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# Refuelling the practicum: From 'neophytes' and 'experts' to collaborative, reflective relationships.

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## Abstract

In 2001, the University of Ballarat introduced a new Bachelor of Education course, and a new model for professional experience aimed at changing the focus away from assessment of the placement, to the learning that occurs within it. As part of this re-generation of the program, we wanted to ensure that the initial enthusiasm generated (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001) continued to provide the 'fuel' for new approaches to student learning. One of the key themes that emerged from students' responses about their experiences in the program, was the relationships that they were developing. As part of a further development of the program, this year we introduced a mentoring system, where the placement is self-assessed, in collaboration with a mentor/teacher. This is aimed at encouraging not only a shift in the learning that occurs within the placement, but also a fundamental change in the nature of the relationships within it. One of the aims of this shift is to encourage a reflective approach amongst our pre-service teachers as well as their teacher/mentors, and in the development of the program itself, so that a more collaborative framework is emerging, and in this paper we report on the resultant changes in students' attitudes.


## Introduction

The new Bachelor of Education course at the University of Ballarat encompasses a new model for professional experience aimed at changing the focus away from a 'technical', competency, assessment of the placement, to the learning that occurs within it. As part of this new program, the professional experience begins very early in the first year of the course, and continues throughout the academic year. Students work in pairs under the guidance of a teacher/mentor. Education studies units were revised to support this program and to facilitate deeper learnings and connections between the learning that occurs at university and within school placements. To continue this process, a revised unit, Creating Learning Environments, was introduced in 2002 as a semester two unit in Year 2 of the course. The unit was specifically designed to encourage more collaborative and reflective approaches to teaching and learning in schools. This paper reports on this initiative and its positive, as well as its negative, outcomes, as well as the learnings gained by both unit staff and students through this process.

## Background

At the end of the first year of the new course in 2001, first year students were surveyed on their responses to the new degree program (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). One of the strongest findings that emerged from their responses was their positive reactions to the new professional experience (practicum placement) program. This program entailed students, or 'pre-service teachers' (PSTs) as they came to be called under the new program, spending a day each week in a primary school from week five of first semester in Year 1 of the course. This placement continued throughout their second year, and PSTs this year undertook the program in 'buddy pairs', under the 'mentorship' rather than the supervision, of the classroom teacher. This approach involved not just a change in nomenclature, but a change in the positioning of relationships within the professional experience. It was designed to move from a model where the 'neophyte' learns from the 'expert', to the learner constructing their own learning in partnership with their peers, and under the guidance and support of their mentor. This approach was designed to facilitate deeper learnings within the professional experience, rather than a technical, 'checklist' approach to assessing competencies. PSTs overwhelmingly reacted positively to the new professional experience program (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001), and their responses were marked by high levels of enthusiasm, expressions of confirmation of career choice, and feedback on the positive relationships built up during the year with teacher/ mentors and children in the classroom.

## New approaches to teaching and learning

Following this positive response from students, in the second year of the program, the new education unit Creating Learning Environments was introduced, which was designed to further build on PSTs' learnings in the professional experience in the first year, and to maintain PSTs' enthusiasm by continuing to use new approaches to student learning to 'fuel' students' enthusiasm and passion for their future career. The new unit ran alongside the weekly placement in schools. The main learning task of the unit was a requirement that PSTs design and deliver an innovative education program or project in their school, based on the school's education or curriculum needs, and in consultation with the school and their teacher/mentor. The projects were required to incorporate innovative and creative learning approaches and be informed by theoretical perspectives such as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), productive pedagogies (Luke, 2002), reflective practice (Korthagen 2001; Schön, 1987), knowledge building communities (Cambourne, 2001) and the new approaches to learning (ACDE, 2001).

The Creating Learning Environments unit involved PSTs investigating, developing and delivering a school-based project that met a particular curriculum or education need of the school. PSTs generally worked on projects in pairs or groups under the guidance of their teacher/mentor. The delivery of the unit itself was also designed to explore alternative methods of delivery, moving away from the transmission or 'banking' (Freire, 1970) approach to teaching and learning, towards a model designed to encourage knowledge building communities and independent learning (Cambourne, 2001). It was designed to provide

maximum support for and encouragement of alternative teaching and learning approaches. 'Information sessions' (on needs analysis design, experiential learning, life wide learning, working with school communities, the inquiry process etc) replaced formal lectures, and tutorials were replaced by 'roundtable discussions' where PSTs were equal partners in the teaching and learning process, teaching and learning from one another through sharing their experiences and insights. In these sessions students were encouraged to participate as equal partners in their learning, in their roles as emerging practitioners, to become 'knowledge building communities' (Cambourne, 2001).

Learning was largely experiential (through the weekly experience in schools), with de-briefing and reflection built in. The intention was that dialogue during the debriefing sessions would be directed by the students. Their needs were to be discussed, anxieties shared, 'critical moments' shared, readings linked to the professional experience program would be distributed and discussed as a group, and oral and written reflections would be integral to the continuing development of the unit. There was a deliberate attempt to foster collaborative learning, to facilitate PST's learning from each others' experiences as well as their own.

> The most under-used resource in higher education is the students themselves. A great deal of research and development work on peer teaching has been done in Australia and elsewhere, and the conclusion is that students are more effective teachers than we are! (Ramsden, 1995, p. 6)

The project planning, implementation and presentation required professional project standards, and culminated in a professional presentation of the project outcomes. The project also gave PSTs an opportunity to develop their own approaches to teaching and learning, rather than just mimicking the approach of the supervising teacher.

Collaboration and reflection were built into all phases of the program. PSTs had to design and deliver the program collaboratively with each other, their teacher/mentor, and the school. Reflection was required throughout the program, through a weekly reflection report, a weekly de-briefing meeting at the university, and following discussions with their teacher/mentor. Teacher/mentors also received training in the new mentoring program about the changed expectations of the relationship between mentor and PST and the need to support PSTs in risk-taking in developing new approaches to teaching and learning. This element of the program is discussed in more detail by our professional practice team partners (see Smith & Zeegers, 2002). The program was designed to provide maximum support to PSTs, rather than working from a position where judgements are made about PSTs' performance. 'Community coordinators' also supported PSTs in their placement. These were people who had substantial experience working in schools (such as ex-principals or part-time teachers) who provided support and feedback to PSTs in their schools. A final, formal 15-day practicum at the end of the second semester moved PSTs into a more structured program where they were then able

to also demonstrate their abilities in conventional classroom environments.

## Theoretical foundations for the approach

The unit and its learning and assessment tasks were designed to enable PSTs to develop skills and abilities that would better equip them to deal with the increasing uncertainty (ACDE, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis & Harvey, 2002) they will certainly be facing in their future teaching careers. The nature of new knowledge and the changing world of work and social environments and expectations (ACDE, 2001: Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) will mean that future teachers will not only need to respond to rapidly changing conditions, increasing diversity, and the 'thicker connections' required in a global world (Gee, 2001), but will have to be able to equip their own students accordingly as well. The need to become more self-reliant and self-directed is evident, as well as the need to shape 'certain kinds of persons' rather than merely transmit knowledge.

> [A] new range of skills will be required, to do less with departing defined knowledge than with shaping a kind of person. In the knowledge economy, excellent learners will be autonomous and self-directed - designers of their own learning experiences, in collaboration with others as well as by themselves (Gee, 2000:51) ...This is not to deny that many contemporary educators are already reflective practitioners, proactive towards change, and well connected towards the broader community. The need for these attributes will surely become more acute. (Kalantzis & Harvey, 2002, p.8)

The new unit was grounded in experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and was informed by the areas of realistic pedagogy (Korthagen, 2001), knowledge building communities (Cambourne, 2001), productive pedagogies (Luke) and 'new learning' propositions (ACDE, 2001). The intention behind the unit was to provide opportunities for PSTs to investigate and develop innovative approaches to their teaching practice based on the principles espoused in these theoretical areas. Their projects had to be firmly based on the principles of experiential learning; aim to develop knowledge building communities amongst the PSTs themselves and their students in schools; involve rich and real-life tasks; be innovative and future-oriented; and include cycles of reflection during and on the completion of the project. Not all projects were successful, but PSTs were encouraged to learn from both 'successes' and 'failures' as part of the experiential and reflective learning cycles. They were encouraged to see risk-taking and experimentation as an unavoidable and desirable component of innovation and creativity. In particular, PSTS were encouraged to implement 'lifewide' learning (ACDE, 2001), that is, learning beyond conventional classroom-based, teacher-directed environments.

> ['New learning' recognizes] [T]hat learning will be lifelong and lifewide, acknowledges the greying of the population and the short shelflife of technological skills. In an era signified by rapid change, the need to promote autonomous learning is paramount - citizens must learn to learn, throughout and across their lives. Lifewide learning recognizes the need for much greater flexibility and diversity of educational experiences: learning should

> occur in parks, in pool halls, and outside of traditional institutions. (ACDE, 2001, p. 2)

We returned to Dewey's (1938) view that experience followed by reflection results in growth. This perspective underpinned the unit and experiential learning formed the nucleus of the unit, and the project, and was followed by reflection where students were encouraged to reflect on the positives and negatives of their project work and its outcomes. The experiential approach also recognised that PSTs' previous experiences of schooling and education would have a major impact on their subsequent learning.

> The fact that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience has important educational implications. Put simply, it implies that all learning is *re*learning. How easy and tempting it is in designing a course to think of the learner's mind as being as blank as the paper in which we scratch our outline. (Kolb, 1984, p. 28)

We recognised that PST's' minds were indeed not 'blank', but that their previous experiences could be effectively foregrounded in order to be able to reflect on their new experiences.

> Experience cannot be bypassed; it is the central consideration of all learning. Learning builds on and flows from experience; no matter what external prompts to learning there might be - teachers, materials, interesting opportunities - learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level. (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993, p. 8)

Rather than replicate, imitate and assimilate, the PSTs are encouraged to experience, reflect, question and collaborate. Their knowledge was progressively constructed, not transmitted from the 'knowledgeable other' or 'expert'. 'In this reductionist view the human mind receives information from the body's senses, stores it like a squirrel, his nuts in data banks, and at best puts pieces of it together to construct a generalization.' (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 4) As Hayes (2002) points out, with reference to beginning teachers (and most relevant to PSTs), they 'are not empty vessels to be filled either, waiting to be filled by Grandgrindean helpings of our wiser experience. They too have an experiential sense of what it might mean - embryonic and theoretical as that might be - to be teaching' (Hayes, 2002, p. 4) We connected with the PSTs' history of experience; we validated this experience by listening and connecting with them; we recognised the influence of prior knowledge and experiences; and we created learning communities. 'The concept of development implies that whatever is added, whatever is new, will be integrated with what is already there, and will indeed grow from what is there' (McIntyre & Hagger, 1992, cited by Korthagen, 2001, p. 6).

The emphasis in the unit was to be on experience - the recognition and validation of student experience; the creation of new and shared knowledge through planned experiences; and the exploration of learning through understanding experience.

The encouragement and development of reflective practice was also a major aim of the unit

and its tasks. The new Bachelor of Education course rationale specifically recognised this need. It stated that future graduates 'will be committed to personal learning that is demonstrated through an openness to ideas, have a reflective, analytical, flexible approach to their practice and be future-oriented as continuing learners'. (University of Ballarat, 2000)

According to Korthagen (2001), 'the student teacher develops his or her own knowledge in a process of reflection on practical situations, which creates a concern and a personal need for learning' (Korthagen, 2001, p.15) 'Mentoring, team teaching and time for collegial discussion and feedback are all vital to the goals of collaborative and flexible learning. Project oriented tasks which reflect and promote the importance of teamwork and collaborative scholarship also need greater recognition in teacher education programs (Kalantzis & Harvey, 2002, p. 9)

Even PSTs' previous experiences of conventional lectures and tutorials delivery were used to reflect on their feelings about the new mode of delivery, which at least initially, provided strong evidence of 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger, 1957) and extreme discomfort. Students found the new approach and different methods of unit delivery unfamiliar and to some extent confronting and confusing. They initially resisted the more independent approach to learning required of them.

An important aspect of this learning journey was to challenge the PSTs' original beliefs (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). These students had completed an intensive 'apprenticeship' regarding the teaching and learning process in the first year of their course. Their own learning had emerged in a particular way, was context specific, and was influenced by their social and cultural environments. For many, their previous experiences of teaching and learning were destined to be replicated in their own practice and many felt that this was entirely satisfactory (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). The professional experience provided the opportunity to be inducted into the professional learning environment where skills, attitudes and methods of teaching and knowledge could be developed rather than merely transmitted. Our intention was to avoid the creation of the 'dutiful technocrat' (Hayes, 2002, p. 5) but to rather provide opportunities for the development of a creative professional, capable of collaborative teamwork; one who is responsive to learners' needs, and is reflective and flexible in multiple learning environments.

For the PSTs, developing a theoretical understanding of the complicated and complex nature of the teaching and learning process was undeniably challenging, and the challenging of existing beliefs, even more so. To some PSTs, theories are what you read about in textbooks. They see them as having minimal relevance to the 'real' world of teaching and, therefore, learning about them is merely a course requirement, with knowledge of these theories assessed in a variety of ways. Our intention was to encourage PSTs to also develop 'small t' theories - what Korthagen (2001) refers to as 'phronesis' (practical wisdom) - through the formal introduction of opportunities to experience and reflect on practice. '[P]hronesis, practical wisdom, or perceptual knowledge, uses rules only as summaries and guides. It must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at improvisation.' (Korthagen, 2001, p.

27, citing Nussbaum, 1986). 'To be able to develop this wider, perception-based type of knowledge in teacher education programs, what we need is not so much theories, articles, books and other conceptual matters, but first and foremost, concrete situations to be perceived, experiences to be had, persons to be met, plans to be exerted and their consequences to be reflected upon.' (Korthagen, 2001, p. 29) The school-based experience, and the school-based project, were designed to provide these concrete situations, and opportunities to meet such persons and reflect upon consequences and outcomes.

The unit was also designed to facilitate the development of supportive relationships, to move away from the apprentice/assessor model. 'Building relationships begins with a genuine concern to listen, to be aware of the changing nature of the classroom context, and to be interested in, and responsive, the needs of the students.' (Loughran & Russell, 1997, p. 59)

Assessment was designed to be developmental rather than regulatory. Data from the previous semesters indicated a PST readiness for this new approach (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). Relationships had been developing during the past semesters, and PSTs had formed meaningful connections with peers, staff, teachers/mentors in schools and individual students during school placements. Our intention was to (re)establish learning communities, based on a mutual respect which allowed for a 'place and space' to develop, to reflect and to discuss experiences. This also required the move away from the traditional lecture/ tutorial model frequently employed by many universities (our own included). Despite the subsequent mounting obstacles - such as timetable restructure, perceptions of some PSTs regarding the expected role of the lecturer/tutor, practicalities of maintaining the 'buddy' partnerships, and the need to form new connections with schools and re-form existing partnerships - the staff team persisted in this vision.

**Student responses**

PSTs' responses to the new unit, and the overall program, were collected via a range of sources towards the end of the semester, where they were asked to write about their views on the unit and the professional experience. One tutorial group (n=12) completed an open-ended 'freewrite' where they were asked to complete a detailed, written reflection. The whole second year cohort (n=90) also met during the final week of lectures and were asked to write about their philosophy of teaching (their attitudes towards teaching and learning); their views about the strengths or weaknesses of the program; and their suggestions for improvements.

A thematic analysis of this data revealed a number of emergent issues. These were:

- Positive responses to the professional experience;
- Confusion relating to expectations of the unit;
- The nature of their learning;
- Responses to learning and assessment tasks; and

- Changing attitudes towards teaching and learning.

## Responses to the professional experience

Responses to the professional experience were again overwhelmingly positive, as they had been in the first year of their course (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). Students commented that they felt the experience was positive, an opportunity to connect their learning at university with their experiences in school, and again a confirmation of career choice.

*Our practicum was the highlight of this unit as it gave us some valuable learning experiences.*

*I certainly got a great deal out of the Practicum this year and I felt I learnt more out in the classroom at school than I did here at uni.*

*I have learnt the most about teaching from observing and listening to my mentor, receiving advice from her and actually having a go myself.*

*My mentor was extremely helpful towards both my teaching experience and my work at the university and has been an exceptional role model for me as a future teacher.*

*I also found the 'buddy' pairs to be an effective way to approach the fieldwork experience as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own teaching methods as well as having somebody in the same situation to reflect on and observe at the same time.*

## Confusion relating to expectations of the unit

Due to the different nature of the delivery and expectations of the unit, and tasks and activities different from those in their previous experiences, PSTs expressed initial confusion and anxiety. Some had difficulty understanding the new expectations and modes of operating, although many embraced the new approaches as opportunities to be more actively engaged in their own learning, and to learn from one another.

*At the beginning of the unit I was feeling really anxious and unsure about [the unit] and whether or not it would be enjoyable and useful.*

*The assessment tasks were a little confusing for me as I did not know what was really required of us and how we should implement it.*

*To me this unit, although very confusing at the start did develop into something extremely worthwhile.*

The nature of their learning

The requirement for most of the learning in the unit to be collaborative was again, at least initially, difficult for some PSTs. PSTs responded well, however, to the 'roundtable discussions' which enabled a sharing of ideas and experiences, especially in relation to their project planning and implementation.

*Groupwork has never been my forte, however this really worked and I would like to see it continued into the future.*

*I like the idea of self - directed learning and think it is important to our learning that we are able to explore the nature of teaching and learning individually.*

*The tuts were also valuable as the different skills and theories that each of us brought into a discussion helped each other.*

*This made me feel better because I was able to voice what things overwhelm me.*

*The lectures and the roundtable discussions were very beneficial and informative.*

Responses to learning and assessment tasks

Although the learning and assessment tasks were initially unfamiliar and prompted some confusion and negative reactions, once PSTs were engaged in the project work, they became more accepting of the new approaches, especially the school-based project.

*One of the turning points in regards to my learning in this unit was the initial discussion of the project assignment. Initially I was anxious about this assignment...but now think that it has been one of (if not the most) meaningful work(s) I have completed at uni.*

*I believe the assignments were very appropriate because they gave us a focus.*

*Our project... is a worthwhile task to undertake as it gets you to use initiative while working within the school community. Having to take the steps to successfully implement the project is very beneficial for our communication skills as we are dealing with the principle [sic] classroom teachers and parents all of which are the key to a successful teaching career.*

*I think the project stands out in this unit.*

*The project turned out to be an excellent idea and as soon as a topic was decided everyone seemed eager to implement this into their field experience schools as soon as possible.*

*I can see the value of the project - excellent for team building.*

*Once I began working on the project I found I was much more engaged with the lectures.*

Changing attitudes towards teaching and learning

PSTs descriptions of their attitudes towards teaching and learning (their personal philosophies of teaching) also displayed a shift in their attitudes from first year where they were more concerned with their own achievement of specific competencies (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001), that is, it shifted from a focus on themselves as teachers, to a focus on the learning of their students. In the first year of their program, PSTs had been reluctant to experiment with their

own approaches to teaching and learning, preferring to watch experienced teachers whom they regarded as 'experts', and learn from them. They were overly concerned with issues such as classroom management and their mastery of 'competencies', including factors such as voice projection and lesson closure. In their second year, they developed a more critical approach to classroom practice, as well as their own practices. Their weekly reflections displayed a deeper level of thinking and reflection, considering the consequences of their actions in the classroom and possible alternatives. Many articulated a changing focus on the student population and the learning environment, and a greater appreciation of the relevance of theory to practice.

Examples of their descriptions of their philosophy of teaching were typically identified as:

- *'Creating a diverse, inclusive learning environment for all students.'*
- *'Catering for students' individual learning needs.'*
- *'Being open to new ideas, concepts and teaching/learning approaches..'*
- *'Having the passion and skills to develop an innovative and effective classroom environment, conducive to learning.'*
- *'Inspiring students to become life-long learners.'*

Some individual examples are:

*I want them to see me as someone who knows some of the answers, but not all of them. I also want to be a teacher that other teachers respect, and can come to for help with things they know I am good at.*

*[My philosophy] is to be a person that embraces the opportunities given to me and to enrich the lives of my students. I want to make learning fun, interesting, accessible and flexible in delivery so that all learning styles are accommodated. Teaching/learning encompasses all aspects of life, so the classroom is only a minor part of the equation and learning can be lifewide and lifelong. My endeavour will be to be flexible, approachable, compassionate and most importantly to make education for my students something they can build on for the rest of their lives and also open up the world for them.*

*My personal philosophy of teaching involves building strong links between school, home and community. It is a philosophy that revolves around enjoyment of learning in a variety of settings. I believe in the promotion of learning for life, including all groups within society- being catered for equally. Everyone has the right to learn. Learning should be in context, it should be useful.*

*[My philosophy is] to be an effective communicator not only in the classroom but in the school*

*community as a whole as well, to inspire not only learning but also life-skills, or to equip my charges with the necessary knowledge and skill to successfully continue on beyond my direct influence.*

## Program implementation - the reality

Despite the lofty ideals that initially drove the development of the unit, the reality of its implementation was somewhat different. The differences in curriculum as intention versus curriculum as outcome (Eisner, 2002) became apparent, as differences in the planned 'course to be run' versus the journey that had been experienced became clear.

Multiple factors contributed to the modification of the program, even before it began, prior to the commencement of semester 2. Some staff withdrew from the program due to illness, alternative employment or a lack of commitment or enthusiasm for the project. Staff involved in the professional experience program had volunteered their time and this contributed to an already hefty workload. The initial 'sweep of enthusiasm' and shared approach for a new approach to tertiary learning was severely tested. Staff to some extent reverted to the 'safety-net' of practices from the past - lectures and tutorials, with a number of guest presenters.

The school-community link was to be the original focus for the PST projects, but in the modified unit, attention was focused primarily on the classroom-school learning landscape, although many groups of PSTs did successfully implement community-based projects. At the beginning of the unit, PSTs were anxious and somewhat sceptical of the approaches and expectations. General comments ranged from "Why aren't we having lectures and tutorials this semester?" to "What is your role as lecturer? We are paying for this unit - what do we get for our dollar?" The self-identification of personal goals was challenging, as was the need to use initiative and assume responsibility for projects. During the implementation of the projects, however, students' attitudes changed remarkably. By the end of the unit, many were able to reflect positively on the skills they had acquired and feel proud of their achievements. Their initial difficulties, however, made us realise that we had perhaps assumed a level of readiness not yet attained by many of this cohort. The innovation may have been too far removed from the individual and group comfort zone.

The unit outcomes taught its designers some powerful lessons about the perhaps inevitable 'bumps' involved in any innovation. The lowlights and the highlights have provided us with a wealth of experiential learning and much fuel for our own reflections.

## Discussion

Despite these sometimes painful lessons for us, however, and initially also for the PSTs, the outcomes for students in terms of their learning were significant. Many students reported that although the project was hard work, and they were initially uneasy about the level of independence required, it was the most positive aspect of the unit. Many reported that it was the most valuable learning experience that had had so far in the course. Schools responded positively to the projects carried out by PSTs, with many of the projects having an enduring benefit for the school. Projects included tree plantings, paintings of murals, walkathons, field trips, concerts, re-cycling programs, salinity projects, theme days and other community and school-based projects. PSTs overwhelmingly commented on the usefulness of the range of skills that they had developing in designing and implementing their projects.

For the unit coordinators, the experience also led us to reflection and re-learning. We had originally been motivated by a number of questions around changing the focus of the professional experience to facilitate deeper learning (Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001). We wanted to investigate what practices, interventions and processes might influence the development of reflective practice in pre-service teachers. Would the development of a framework and implementation of a specifically designed program be sufficient to develop more reflective practices? How would success in this regard be measured? Our intention, in relation to this program, was to provide a cohesive program rather than a discrete collection of disconnected units, and to continue the process of challenging the pre-service teachers' perceptions about learning about teaching by encouraging questioning, reflective responses. The result was that we were perhaps left with much 'fuel' for further investigation and reflection, but more questions than when we began.

How might this innovation affect the PSTs and their learning? Was it a case of 'coming, ready or not'? Who will own the change? Will all stakeholders embrace it? What is the role of 'personal passion' in the embracing and progression of innovation? What effects will this innovation have on the teacher/mentors in the schools? How will the staff respond? Can this innovation be sustained?

Although as a staff, we had been convinced that our intentions had been made 'explicit' and our objectives clear, this did not seem to be the case for many of the PSTs. So, what does the process of 'making explicit' mean? Is it the printed text? Is it the verbal message? Is it in the modeling presented by the lecturers/tutors? Is it extracted from the 'hidden curriculum'? Whatever 'explicit' means, in this case, the intention, it now appears with the benefit of hindsight, was not clear to all.

However, we must be mindful of the need to avoid premature judgments and aware of the factors influencing the implementation of this program at this point in time. More positive outcomes may be obvious in the longer term. It would seem appropriate at this point, to reflect from a distance and again, in retrospect, to continue this longitudinal study across the years, through the 'web' of our own and our PSTs' experiences.

## Conclusion: Lessons for the future

This paper has been an attempt to elaborate on 'what goes on in teacher education' (Korthagen, 2002, p. 8) It is not a sanitary, uncritical analysis of the innovation; it does not necessarily report the process to be effective or even worthy of another chance. And yet, the learnings for so many have been extraordinary, and even more than we may have anticipated. We have taken the challenge to connect, innovate and create new knowledge building communities.

Our future challenge is to continue the modification of professional practice to make the experience meaningful for all involved. Despite the uncertainty involved, there were many positive learning outcomes, and certainly potential for further learning and improvement. The lessons for the future are the need for shared ethos and understandings of the innovation amongst staff; clearer and explicit expectations of PSTs; and stronger scaffolding for PSTs in changing teaching and learning practices.

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